

Assignment of Tasks to Unregulated Care Providers

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*The legislated mandate of the Saskatchewan Association of Licensed Practice Nurses
is to protect the public through the regulation of Licensed Practical Nurses.*

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Using this document

Practice Guidelines are documents that help LPNs understand their responsibilities and legal obligations to enable them to make safe and ethical decisions when practicing. They provide an outline of professional accountabilities and relevant legislation (CNO, 2020). This document describes the Saskatchewan Association of Licensed Practical Nurses (SALPN) practice expectations for nurses assigning tasks to unregulated care providers. All SALPN documents are available from the SALPN website at www.salpn.com

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Assignment of Tasks to Unregulated Care Providers Practice Guideline

Regulatory Alignment

This resource has been collaboratively created by the Registered Psychiatric Nurses Association of Saskatchewan (RPNAS), the Saskatchewan Association of Licensed Practical Nurses (SALPN), and the College of Registered Nurses of Saskatchewan (CRNS). The three nursing regulators acknowledge that all regulated nurses in Saskatchewan assign tasks to Unregulated Care Providers (UCPs). This resource provides clear expectations and supports nurses at the point of care to meet their practice standards. The principles outlined within this document replace previous direction provided about delegation and assignments to UCPs.

Purpose

The purpose of this resource is to provide direction for regulated nurses (Licensed Practical Nurses [LPNs], Registered Nurses [RNs], and Registered Psychiatric Nurses [RPNs]) in the assignment of tasks to UCPs on an individual client-specific¹ basis to assist in the provision of client care, keeping the best interest of the client at the center of all care decisions. Regulated professional nurses are accountable to their clients, regulatory body and employer for providing safe, effective and ethical care. Nurses must self-assess and be sure of their own knowledge, skill, ability, critical thinking and judgment before providing care and assigning tasks to a UCP.

Introduction

Regulated nurses assign tasks to UCPs as part of providing high-quality, collaborative, holistic, and client-centered care. Professional standards, job descriptions, and employer policies and procedures provide the structure for UCPs to accept assigned tasks safely and competently from regulated nurses.

Unregulated Care Providers

UCPs may have various titles, such as continuing care assistant, special care aide, healthcare aide, or special education assistant. They may be formally educated or may have received training on the job, or a combination of both. UCPs are not registered or licensed by a regulatory body; consequently, they have no legally defined scope of practice. The employer defines and is responsible for the UCP's role description, required training and performance management.

¹ The term client is used for patient, resident, etc. throughout this document and includes family.

Assignment of Task

Assignment of task refers to the allocation of specific tasks from regulated nurses to UCPs whose employer authorizes these duties as within their employment role. With assignment, the regulated nurse retains authority for the task and accountability for the coordination of care. The task is one part of the overall care of the client.

Foundations for Safe Assignment of Tasks

The following foundations apply to the safe assignment of task:

- The provision of safe and effective client care is the focus when making decisions about assignment of tasks
- The task being assigned by the regulated nurse must be within their regulated scope of practice and their personal competency and must be within the employer-determined range of duties and personal competency of the UCP
- The regulated nurse complies with their practice standards and ethics
- The regulated nurse and UCP work within employer policies to support appropriate assignment of tasks
- No employer policy can relieve the regulated nurse of their professional accountabilities
- A UCP cannot reassign accepted tasks.

Accountabilities Associated with Assignment of Tasks

Working together, employers and regulated nurses are accountable for creating processes to support client-focused care within collaborative nursing teams.

Employer and UCP Accountabilities

Employers create a workplace culture that reasonably assures communication, teamwork and safe assignment of task. Additionally, employers:

- Create and implement evidence-informed policies and procedures to support the UCP to safely accept an assignment of task
- Create and implement evidence-informed policies and procedures to support regulated nurses to:
 - Safely assign tasks
 - Provide ongoing assessment of the client and the UCP's ability to safely complete the task
 - Adjust or rescind an assignment of task, if needed, to support safe patient care
- Promote the safe and competent delivery of nursing services by:
 - Collaborating with the nursing team within the practice area
 - Assessing the specific client population in the environment
 - Assessing the required and available resources in the environment
 - Providing staffing at levels that meet client needs

- Determine and provide training and education, including knowledge and skill requirements, for the UCP to gain the competence required to safely perform assigned tasks
- Create and implement a process for the regulated nurse to communicate the effectiveness of assigning tasks to the UCP
- Be responsible for all aspects of employment, including performance and competency management
- Monitor and evaluate whether policies, procedures, and staffing models support the delivery of safe and competent nursing care, including safe assignment of tasks
- Support the UCP to:
 - Be aware of their scope of employment and work within it
 - Understand relevant employer policies and job or role descriptions
 - Acquire the education, knowledge, and skill to perform assigned tasks safely
 - Only perform tasks they are competent to complete safely
 - Report to the regulated nurse when they are not able to safely perform a task, including when there are unexpected or unusual outcomes from a task
 - Competently perform assigned tasks
 - Ask questions and seek assistance as necessary
 - Communicate in an ongoing and open manner with staff
 - Document completion of tasks according to employer policies

Regulated Nurse Accountabilities

Regulated nurses retain accountability for the decision to assign a task or tasks to the UCP. Additionally, regulated nurses should consider the following:

- When assigning a task to a UCP, the regulated nurse will:
 - Work within employer processes to confirm:
 - The assigned task is within the UCP’s employer-determined range of duties
 - The UCP has been oriented and educated and is competent to perform the task
 - Policies and procedures are in place to support the assignment of task
 - Assess the client to determine the appropriateness of the assignment of task
 - The client has well-defined care needs, support systems, and coping mechanisms
 - The activity and client response has been established over time
 - The client’s condition is stable and predictable and not expected to change
 - The client, their family, or their support person may direct their care.
 - Develop or participate in the development of the client’s nursing care plan
 - Know the intended and unintended outcomes of the task
 - Identify and manage risks involved in performing the specific task
 - Determine the level of supervision required
 - Ensure the required resources are readily available for support, consultation, or intervention.

- Assess and evaluate the UCP's competence and the appropriateness of the assigned task on an ongoing basis in order to:
 - Determine, with the UCP, when, where, and from whom the UCP should seek assistance and to whom the UCP should report the outcome of the task – Adjust the assignment of task as required.
- Provide ongoing supervision to the UCP knowing that:
 - Supervision is an active process of assigning, consulting, guiding, and monitoring an individual's performance of a task to influence the outcome of care²
 - The level and frequency of supervision must be determined by the regulated nurse assigning tasks to the UCP and cannot solely be determined by the employer or agency policy
 - Supervision needs may change over time as factors associated with the UCP's individual level of competence, the environment, and client needs change³
- Evaluate and communicate the effectiveness of the assignment of task by reflecting on the following:
 - Was the assignment of task appropriate for the client?
 - Was the client's outcome optimal, satisfactory, or unsatisfactory?
 - Were there any problems or concerns; if so, how were they addressed?
 - Was communication timely and effective?
 - Does the plan of care need to be adjusted?
 - Were there any "learning moments" for the UCP and/or regulated nurse?
 - Was appropriate feedback provided to the UCP?

² Canadian Nurses Protective Society (2012); College of Registered Nurses of Alberta (2019); Nova Scotia College of Nursing (2019)

³ Nova Scotia College of Nursing (2019)

Conclusion

Regulated nurses assign tasks to UCPs as part of working within a collaborative team to provide safe, competent, and ethical client care. Regulated nurses retain responsibility for the nursing process and accountable to their professional standards within the process of assigning tasks. Ongoing evaluation with a focus on what is in the client's best interest supports continuous quality improvement and positive outcomes for clients and families.

Assignment of Task Process



Source: Adapted from National Council of State Boards of Nursing, 2019

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